

Gifted Child Quarterly

<http://gcq.sagepub.com/>

Myth 10: Examining the Ostrich : Gifted Services Do Not Cure a Sick Regular Program

Ann Robinson

Gifted Child Quarterly 2009 53: 259

DOI: 10.1177/0016986209346935

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gcq.sagepub.com/content/53/4/259>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



National Association for Gifted Children

Additional services and information for *Gifted Child Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gcq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gcq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://gcq.sagepub.com/content/53/4/259.refs.html>

Myth 10: Examining the Ostrich

Gifted Services Do Not Cure a Sick Regular Program

Ann Robinson

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

More than 25 years ago, the myth that a small gifted program compensated for a “sick” regular education program took its place in the *Gifted Child Quarterly* special issue pantheon. The myth was framed from the perspective of school districts who implemented limited, part-time programs for gifted students to “comfort themselves” that the needs of these learners were met effectively (Ward, 1982). In other words, a district behaved like an ostrich by hiding its head in the sand of an identifiable, but limited program and by ignoring the larger, looming problem of an inadequate total school environment for gifted learners. The 1982 refutation of the ostrich myth argued that small, separate and identifiable gifted programs resulted in more problems than they solved. Essentially, Ward (1982) explained that by creating some kind of gifted program, even a very small one, schools were ignoring the real and pressing problem of creating learning environments all day and every day that met the needs of advanced learners. The 1980’s problems promulgated by small but visible gifted programs included vulnerability to charges of elitism, failure to connect specialized services with general education, and the denial of enrichment opportunities to students who could benefit from them (Ward, 1982).

Twenty-Five Years on: A More Nuanced Myth

In its present form, the myth is more nuanced because our understanding of programming options and policies are more elaborated. We have more fully explored what is recommended in terms of services for talented learners (Shore, Cornell, Robinson, & Ward, 1991) and which practices have evidence to support them (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). Advocates with research support to back them have called for a

continuum of services for talented learners rather than single model programs (Delcourt, Cornell, & Golderberg, 2007). Some exemplary state policies have even outlined requirements to provide options for service delivery at all grade levels (Clinkenbeard, Kolloff, & Lord, 2007).

In addition, the myth is informed by lessons learned in the past 25 years about the disruptions caused by the discontinuation of services (Purcell, 1993; Starko, 1990), the difficulties of relying solely on regular classroom models (Bernal, 2003; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyons, & Salvin, 1993; Westberg & Daoust, 2004), general educator neglect (Moon, Callahan, Tomlinson & Miller, 2002; Moon, Tomlinson, & Callahan, 1995), and the important linkage between advocacy, policy, and programmatic infrastructure (Robinson & Moon, 2003).

The original ostrich myth, that the existence of a small, token service to talented learners will cure schools unresponsive to their needs, is reduced in salience. First, the availability of specialized services to talented learners appears to have declined and is in danger of collapsing from a lack of funding and program infrastructure (VanTassel-Baska, 2006). Thus, the myth may have little purchase because fewer programs and services of any size appear to exist. It is difficult to bury one’s head in the sand when the sandlot has been removed. Second, the focus of the reform movement and its policy tool, No Child Left Behind, has been on struggling learners. Thus, neither resources nor attention in the last decade have been directed toward learners who are already proficient. One unintended outcome of No Child Left Behind has been the

Author’s Note: Please address correspondence to Ann Robinson, Vice President, National Association for Gifted Children, Director, Center for Gifted Education, SUA-RM101, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 S. University Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72204; e-mail: aerobinson@ualr.edu.

diminution of concern about talented learners (Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009). Loveless (2008) characterizes their stagnant achievement scores as demonstrating “languid performance trends” on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (p. 35).

Finally, the national failure with the vulnerable population of low-income, high-achieving learners has been particularly acute from preschool to graduate school (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007). Thus, the suggestion that a small, severely underresourced, and low-priority effort on behalf of talented learners in the schools will by some miracle correct the larger educational picture for them and somehow serve to revitalize the educational opportunities for the general cohort of learners in a school is extraordinarily naïve. Evidence simply does not support this myth nor its two unspoken assumptions—that gifted and talented services are unitary and that it is the responsibility of gifted programs to improve the overall school instructional experience.

An Alternative Bird: The Continuum of Services Model

Rather than isolated, single-shot programs offered at limited grade levels and dependent on the idiosyncratic instructional interests of the teachers, models of service that operate across the K-12 continuum and that are clearly linked to postsecondary opportunity get the nod from most experts in the field today. Such complex offerings are given as the exemplar in program design by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Pre-K-12 Program Standards and explicated in their accompanying annotated guide (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 2000). Furthermore, the new NAGC-CEC national standards for the field with respect to teacher preparation expect educators to know about many program delivery models and be able to plan and implement appropriate instruction within those models. Again, those standards are evidence based and explicated in guides for university preparation programs (Johnsen, VanTassel-Baska, & Robinson, 2008) and for school districts (Kitano, Montgomery, VanTassel-Baska, & Johnsen, 2008). Standards such as these mitigate simplistic, small-scale programs offered to a small minority of students who could benefit from them.

Bernal (2003) recommends that gifted programs adopt as an endgame goal, “the development of gifted young adults.” His reasoning is that services are less likely to be fragmentary or swallowed up and rendered

ineffective by inclusion initiatives if the goal implies that services begin early and continue until talented learners emerge from the Pre-K-Grade 12 continuum. State policies that demand a minimum level of contact time with a specially prepared teacher appear to support the continued existence of other services more effectively than policies that are silent on that point (Clinkenbeard et al., 2007).

In conclusion, we continue to hold the myth that a gifted program can rescue an unresponsive general education program, but we have modified our views of what constitute services for talented learners. We expect a mosaic of services that meet the needs of diverse learners across the full spectrum of grade levels from early childhood to high school. A more reasonable set of beliefs with respect to the ostrich myth includes the recognition that without constant advocacy, schools focused on bringing students up to proficient performance have little reason to concern themselves with learners who have already attained it.

References

- Bernal, E. (2003). To no longer educate the gifted: Programming for gifted students beyond the era of inclusionism. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47, 183-191.
- Clinkenbeard, P. R., Kolloff, P. B., & Lord, E. W. (2007). *A guide to state policies in gifted education* (CD-ROM). Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
- Delcourt, M. A. B., Cornell, D. G., & Goldberg, M. D. (2007). Cognitive and affective learning outcomes of gifted elementary students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 54, 359-381.
- Johnsen, S.K., VanTassel-Baska, J. & Robinson, A. (2008). Using the national gifted education standards for university teacher preparation program. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kitano, M., Montgomery, D., VanTassel-Baska, J., & Johnsen, S. K. (2008). *Using the national gifted education standards for Pre-K-12 professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Landrum, M. S., Callahan, C. M., & Shaklee, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Aiming for excellence: Annotations to the NAGC Pre-K-12 gifted program standards*. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
- Loveless, T. (2008). An analysis of NAEP data, In High-achieving students in the era of NCLB (pp. 13-48). Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
- Moon, T. R., Callahan, C. M., Tomlinson, C. A., & Miller, E. M. (2002). *Middle school classrooms: Teachers' reported practices and student perceptions* (RM 02164). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Moon, T. R., Tomlinson, C. A., & Callahan, C. M. (1995). *Academic diversity in the middle school: Results of a national survey of middle school administrators and teachers* (RM 95124). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

- Purcell, J. E. (1993). The effects of the elimination of gifted and talented programs on participating students and their parents. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 37, 177-187.
- Robinson, A. & Moon, S. M. (2003). The national study of state and local advocacy in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47, 8-25.
- Robinson, A., Shore, B. M., & Enersen, D. L. (2007). *Best practices in gifted education: An evidence-based guide*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Scot, T. P., Callahan, C. M., & Urquhart, J. (2009). Paint-by-number teachers and cookie-cutter students: The unintended effects of high-stakes testing on the education of gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 31, 40-52.
- Shore, B. M., Cornell, D. G., Robinson, A., & Ward, V. S. (1991). *Recommended practices in gifted education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Starko, A. (1990). Life and death of a gifted program: Lessons not yet learned. *Roeper Review*, 13, 33-38.
- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2006). A content analysis of evaluation findings across 20 gifted programs: A clarion call for enhanced gifted program development. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 50, 199-213.
- VanTassel-Baska, J., & Stambaugh, T. (2005). Challenges and possibilities for serving gifted learners in the regular classroom. *Theory Into Practice*, 44, 211-217.
- Ward, M. (1982). The "ostrich syndrome": Do gifted programs cure sick regular programs? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 26, 34-36.
- Westberg, K., Archambault, F., Dobyns, S., & Salvin, T. (1993). The classroom practices observational study. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 16, 120-146.
- Westberg, K., & Daoust, M. E. (2004). *The results of the replication of the classroom practices survey in two states*. Storrs, CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Wyner, J. S., Bridgeland, J. M., & DiIulio, J. J., Jr. (2007). *The achievement trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from lower-income families*. Retrieved February 1, 2009 from http://www.jkcf.org/assets/files/0000/0084/Achievement_Trap.pdf

Ann Robinson is a professor of education and founding Director of the Center for Gifted Education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She is a former editor of the *Gifted Child Quarterly*, serves on the Board of Directors of the National Association for Gifted Children as the Vice President, and received the Early Leader, the Early Scholar, and Distinguished Service Awards from the association. In 2004, she and coauthor Sidney Moon received the *Gifted Child Quarterly* Paper of the Year Award for "The National Study of State and Local Advocacy in Gifted Education." With Shore, Cornell, and Ward, Ann coauthored *Recommended Practices in Gifted Education: A Critical Analysis*. Her most current book is *Best Practices in Gifted Education: An Evidence-Based Guide* coauthored with Bruce Shore of McGill University and Donna Enersen of Purdue University.